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UNCLAS ABU DHABI 00447

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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000447

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI OCV PROGRAM RUNS SMOOTHLY IN THE UAE

REF: A) ABU DHABI 388 B) ABU DHABI 305 C) ABU DHABI

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¶1. Summary: Counting ballots cast by UAE-based Iraqis who participated in elections began Monday in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. International Organization for Migration (IOM) officials estimate it will take two to three days for 36 staff members to tally votes and publish unofficial results. Poll officials gave no indication of when official election results would be available, stating only that they would be available &when Baghdad is ready.⁸ While registration and voting ran smoothly, there was both praise and criticism of the process. Many criticized the separation of registration and voting dates as having suppressed their participation. Many who chose to vote called the election a milestone, and an effective first step toward peace. End summary.

A FEW CRITICISMS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

¶2. Although the overall mood at the polling centers was festive and emotional, the most prominent resident crony of the former Iraqi regime called the election a &farce.⁸ Dr. Mohammad Al Douri, former Ambassador of Iraq to the UN, told a Gulf News reporter, &All Iraqis believe in democracy. But how can we talk about free elections under occupation? Any result will be like an illegitimate child.⁸ He also criticized the fact that voters had to vote for parties, not individuals, and that the lists were drawn along sectarian lines, discouraging pluralism. He opined, &The only winners will be the Americans and their puppet government, and this will lead to the fragmentation of Iraq.⁸ Gulf News also reported one instance of a voter who stormed out of a polling center without casting his ballot, angry because poll organizers asked him to indicate whether he was Sunni or Shi,a.

¶3. The IOM continued to take criticism for separating the registration and voting processes, which some people said prevented thousands of otherwise-eligible Iraqis from participating. One newspaper reported that about 100 people, many who traveled to the UAE from Oman and other Gulf countries, claimed they were unaware that they could not register and vote on the same day, and were turned away at the polling station. Another observer was quoted as saying that around 8,000 Iraqis in Kuwait and 3,000 Iraqis in Qatar could not afford to come to the UAE twice, and therefore were not able to participate in the elections. Local organizers, including the head of the Abu Dhabi-based Iraqi Businessmen,s Council, seconded this complaint, saying that this system had disenfranchised thousands of Iraqis throughout the Gulf (ref. A).

VOTING IS A MILESTONE

¶4. Despite these criticisms, many of those who chose to vote were thrilled to have the opportunity to finally have a say in their country,s government. One voter, who accompanied his son to the polls, said that, while he was happy to vote, he understood the arguments of those who chose not to vote. &They say that the country is under occupation, so voting cannot have legitimacy. Without occupation, there would be legitimacy. But I think these people miss the point of the elections.8 Many families brought children under the legal voting age to the polls to celebrate the occasion and teach them about the electoral process. One Dubai-based voter from Baghdad told a Gulf News reporter, &We are reborn. It is a celebration, a wedding day for Iraq.8 He said it did not matter who he voted for, because all candidates would make a constitution that would respect all Iraqis. An elderly woman in a wheelchair said, &I would have crawled to vote for my Iraq.8 A 60-year-old Iraqi economist told a reporter that the last elections in Iraq were held when he was 10. &It,s my first time to vote. Most Iraqis I know are also voting for the first time,8 he said. Another participant was quoted in Khaleej Times, referencing the ink stain marking him as a voter, as saying, &When I look at the ink on my finger, I see it as a mark of freedom.8 A young woman who voted with her friends told the same reporter, &I hope every Arab becomes familiar with this feeling of elation, after being able to vote.8

MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS

¶5. Both English and Arabic language media outlets followed the registration and elections closely and printed updates daily. Reporters included both praise and criticism in most reports, and explained the voting process in detail. One Arabic language newspaper, Al Bayan, reported the story of one Israeli who was allowed to vote in Amman, since his grandfather was an Iraqi. The same paper also published a photo of an Iraqi in the U.S. who, along with a friend, kissed an American flag after they voted.

¶6. Baghdad minimize considered.
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